Durham Anthropology Journal
Volume 16(2) 2009: 8–22. Copyright © 2009 Peter Collins
ISSN 1742-2930

On Resistance: The Case of 17th Century Quakers

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http://www.dur.ac.uk/anthropology.journal/vol16/iss2/collins.pdf

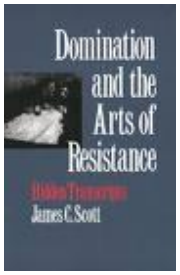
Abstract

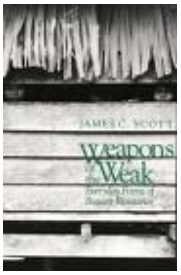
Among the most influential theories of political resistance is that of the American political theorist, James C. Scott. Drawing on Scott's influential theoretical paradigm I present an historical anthropology of seventeenth century Quakerism, focusing on this religious movement from its genesis in around 1650, to the Act of Toleration in 1689. My intention is to draw on accounts of early Quaker faith and practice in order to interrogate key components of Scott's thesis. I conclude that despite the undoubted usefulness of Scott's work it is at once both too broad and too narrow and that it should be tested against other, apparently 'marginal', cases.

Keywords: political resistance, religious dissent; Quakerism; seventeenth century; historical anthropology

Introduction

My aim in writing this paper is to engage in what should be a profitable dialogue with the American political theorist James C. Scott. I am particularly interested in the arguments that Scott presents in two of his books: *Weapons of the Weak* (WW, 1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (*DAR*, 1990).[2]





[2] These can in fact can be read as Volumes I and II of the same book, with the second (*DAR*) being a more thorough theoretical exploration of themes emerging from the earlier ethnography (*WW*).

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Volume 16(2) 2009: 8–22. Copyright © 2009 Peter Collins
ISSN 1742-2930

It is here that Scott lays out his theory of political resistance, a theory which has received a great deal of scholarly attention and which remains influential both within the field of political theory and in closely related fields, including sociology and anthropology. I review and interrogate Scott's work on resistance through the lens provided by my own work on seventeenth century (English) Quakers. The Quakers provide a case which is both interesting and challenging with regards Scott's work. On the one hand, Scott himself presents examples from the seventeenth century, on the other hand he draws only on secondary literature (Christopher Hill in particular) and never develops his discussion of such cases. There are, I believe, several reasons for his rather half-hearted consideration of such cases. Firstly, Scott (1985) focuses almost entirely on a single case, the contemporary Malay peasantry. In this largely ethnographic study, Scott presents an often brilliant account of the modes of resistance adopted by the Malay villagers amongst whom he lived (during the 1970s). Secondly, in *DAR*, it is Scott's intention to present a comparative and generalised theory, drawn both on his Malay material and on dozens of other cases which he argues supports his central thesis. Given his objective – to present a general theory of peasant resistance—he quite rightly eschews the temptation to present these exemplars in any detail. I suspect, however, that there are other reasons why Scott merely mentions seventeenth-century cases. Scott is a political theorist and not a historian; seventeenth century texts are available but their study is time-consuming and requires considerable knowledge of the period if they are to be properly understood in their context. Finally, Scott is primarily interested in explaining *peasant* resistance and it could be argued that by the mid seventeenth century, England was no longer a feudal society and the peasantry had disappeared (Hill 1972, chapter 3). This is largely, though not entirely, true in that seventeenth century England remained overwhelmingly rural and agricultural, and manifested a significant political, economic and cultural residue of feudalism.

The Quaker case, then, is both interesting and theoretically significant for a number of reasons. First, the social, political and economic context both is and is not like the other key cases presented by Scott (both in *WW* and *DAR*) in that mid seventeenth century England was no longer a simple feudal society: Quakers were never slaves nor peasants in any typically defined sense. Quaker resistance can be understood just as easily in terms of religious as political and economic resistance, against an oppressive, but in the early years, revolutionary opposition: although couched in almost entirely religious terms, Quaker resistance undoubtedly had significant political overtones, recognised by both Quakers and their opponents alike. Finally, Quaker records are unusually rich and provide by far way the most complete picture of the faith and practice of a seventeenth century radical group.[3]

Scott on resistance

Scott develops his thesis over two substantial books together numbering over 500 pages. However, setting out his main argument in brief is not difficult since he does so himself on numerous occasions in both texts. Since the meaning of the term itself is contested, let us begin with Scott's definition of 'resistance' (1985: 290):

> class resistance includes any act(s) by member(s) of a subordinate class that is or are intended either to mitigate or deny claims (e.g., rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (e.g., landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (e.g., work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those superordinate classes.

[3] As is the general custom, in this paper the terms 'Quaker' and 'Friend' are synonymous.

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Scott supports the use of this definition by pointing out that it allows for action undertaken either by individuals or groups, it focuses on 'the material basis of class struggle' and assumes that in describing and explaining resistance, we do better to concentrate on intentions rather than consequences (1985: 290) and this seems reasonable given that many acts of resistance leave the social order intact. On the other hand, as Scott sensibly admits, the determination of intentionality is often far from clear. In the village of Sedaka where he carried out his fieldwork, peasant farmer stole rice from landowners and such an act may be a intended as an act of resistance. But as Scott points out, the peasant's motivating intention was just as likely to have the responsibility he felt for providing for his family. This does not seem to me to be a critical point though, in that our motivations for taking action are seldom simple and are, more often that not, multiple, unconscious and even contradictory. Intentions, then, are often difficult to precisely specify – even our own.

Scott (1985, 291-2) goes on to interrogate the oft-described division of acts of resistance into two types: 'real resistance' and 'token resistance'. Real resistance is organised, systematic, and principled, has revolutionary consequences and embodies ideas or intentions that negate the basis of domination itself. Token resistance, on the other hand, is assumed to be unorganised, unsystematic and individualistic, opportunistic and self-indulgent, has no revolutionary consequences, and implies an accommodation with the dominant regime. At this point, Scott presents, briefly, his central argument, which is that this crude classification of acts of resistance seriously underestimates the importance of a whole range of social action. Resistance, he argues, comprises relatively minor and mostly 'hidden' actions. There may, at some point, perhaps after decades or even centuries of these small, non-public actions, a major uprising after which the social order is overturned – but such events are rare and only appear sudden and inexplicable to the elite because resistance has existed as a steady though largely unregarded undercurrent. In Scott's term (developed at length throughout *DAR*) the many acts of resistance that generally go unnoticed by those in power form a 'hidden transcript', which exists alongside the dominant and most public culture of the elite – which is generally taken as culture per se. As he explains, public acts of resistance are likely to be punished, whereas, disguised or hidden acts of resistance largely go unnoticed, at least by the powerful.

Interestingly, Scott refrains from reflecting on his use of the term 'class' which, as I will demonstrate below, is particularly challenging in the Quaker case. I should add that I have merely sketched out in the broadest terms Scott's argument and have omitted entirely his many telling examples taken from various periods of history and from a multitude of different societies.

The case of seventeenth-Century Quakerism

Scott's working definition of resistance is all well and good, but with the Quaker case in mind, what about that word 'class'? Contemporary commentators, including Quakers and non-Quakers, frequently point out that Friends were a people of 'the middling sort'. Contemporary scholars, with a relatively broad cross-section of records to draw on, agree (Barbour 1964:75-8, 84-93; Davies 2000: ch. 11; Hurwich 1970; Reay 1980, 1975; Vann 1969a: ch. 2, 1969b). Indeed the transition, in England, from a feudal to a capitalist society was slow and painful while debate continues over the kind of evidence that serves to mark this transition. Certainly, the English peasantry had disappeared by the time of the period that concerns us here. There was a burgeoning population of 'masterless men' (Hill 1972, chapter 3), most of whom were drifting from the countryside and into the larger towns, notably Bristol and London. This accelerated process of urbanisation was the outcome of well documented push and pull factors. Agricultural labourers were pushed from their rural homes by the gathering momentum of the enclosure movement, and were pulled towards the towns by the prospect of employment.

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So, the Quaker movement certainly did not, in itself constitute a class. Indeed, they are most often defined by contemporary sociologists as a sect, though in some senses they might be described as an interest group or voluntary organisation in today's increasingly secular parlance. However, Friends were at first, drawn from a relatively narrow segment of society and certainly saw themselves as opposing the elite, the powerful, 'the establishment'. During the 1650s the group developed mainly in the poorer North and West of England and consisted mainly of yeoman, husbandmen and rural artisans and their wives. By 1660, Quakerism was flourishing in the towns and cities primarily among the poorer sections of urban society. By the 1680s, membership was more varied, with some friends (notably William Penn and Robert Barclay and Anthony Pearson) welcome at Court (Horle 1988: 92). However, for most of the period in question, the Quaker movement can be identified as comprising those who were living rural lives in the north west of England, a region which was considerably poorer than the rest of the country – and certainly saw itself in opposition to the well-to-do merchants and aristocracy, characterised as mainly southern. Region would seem to be as important as class, then.[4]

Quakerism might most easily be understood as a product of the Civil War, which gave birth to dozens (maybe hundreds) of sects and radical groups of one dispensation or another. However, in terms of Scott's argument regarding the slow but steady pressure on the state built up by small acts of resistance over a long period of time it is worth noting that seventeenth-century Quakerism was deeply rooted in the religious and socio-economic and political radicalism of the previous century, and in particular on religious movements which resisted the dominance of Catholicism and Catholic faith and practice both prior to and following the Reformation. There is hardly space here to trace these roots in any detail but mention should be made of the Lollard tradition, which ran a parallel course with Calvinism and the other major threads of religious reform which more obviously brought about and sustained the establishment of the Church of England under the Henry VIII in the 1530s.[5] The Lollards were among the first who separated from the newly established Anglican Church in the

[4] Hill (1972) argues convincingly that the North and West was the locus of much radical activity. The Particular Baptists were strongest in Wales, and the Grindletonians, another Anabaptist group were based in and around Grindleton in Yorkshire. Leveller and Ranter groups were first of all a northern phenomenon.

[5] The Established Church which was by 1600 largely a Presbyterian Puritanism was already far stronger in the South and East of England (Hill 1972: 77pp).

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1540s, finding the new Dispensation still too Catholic for their tastes. The Lollards were more often called Anabaptists or Familist by the seventeenth century, and remained a primarily northern tendency.[6] George Fox, the leading Quaker, speaks of meeting groups of 'Seekers' and 'Shattered Baptists' during his first sorties into the North.[7] The faith and practice of these groups already contained the seed of what would become known as Quakerism.[8] Quakerism provided a final resting place for many of those who were already involved in radicals, including Gerard Winstanley (Digger) and John Lilburne (Leveller).

Charles II (reigned 1660-85)

William Penn (1644-1718) prominent English Quaker

Let us turn, at last, to those actions undertaken by Friends that Scott would recognise as acts of resistance. As I mentioned above, virtually every aspect of Quaker faith and practice constituted a continual string of acts of resistance to the State and the Established Church. Many of these practices might seem, in themselves, trivial, but as Scott maintains, together they formed a serious and growing threat to the status quo. Quaker practice was grounded, in every instance, by their underlying belief in the Second Covenant – that is the life of Christ, as presented in the Gospels. However, their position was complicated (and therefore often misunderstood by their enemies) by the prominence they gave to the inward light, the light of Christ that was freely given to every man, woman and child. Most significantly, this gave rise to a loosely knit theology which stood in direct opposition to the predestinarian ideas of the Calvinists who led the attack on Catholicism. From the early 1650s on, Quakers operationalised their beliefs by working out a number of 'testimonies'. The testimonies constituted an increasingly ordered discipline which impacted on every aspect of an individual's life (Collins 2002).

By 1660, a Quaker was very easily identified by her or his plain speech and plain dress, for example. Davies (2000: ch. 2) calls them 'the Quaker tribe', characterised by an extraordinary tight-knittedness, strengthened by the discipline of endogamy. Anthony Cohen (1985) would note their energetic commitment to symbolic boundary-making. The typical Quaker, dressed in dark, unpatterned and unembellished clothing, would greet others simply, without the generally expected

[6] A brief though excellent account of English Lollards can be found in Lambert (2002: Ch. 14).

[7] George Fox was himself a Leicestershire artisan. He began to preach in the mid 1640s making contact with others who had already adopted a faith and practice similar to what later became know as Quakerism. There is considerable debate on the issue of Quaker leadership, though Fox was, without doubt, the key organiser (Bittle 1986; Moore 2000: Ch. 1; Ingle 1994; Reay 1985).

[8] Quakerism, it is worth remarking, was one of a great many radical groups whose roots lay in the Civil War. For the Ranters, see McGregor, Capp, Smith and Gibbons 1993; McGregor and Reay (eds) 1984; McGregor 1976-7; Davis, J.C. 1990; for the Levellers, Aylmer (ed) 1975; for the Muggletonians, Hill, Reay and Lamont (eds.) 1983, Lamont 2006; for the Fifth Monarchy Men, Capp 1972. A good overview is to be found in McGregor and Reay eds) 1984. I cite these texts partly in order that the reader might like to consider the extent to which Quakers differed, with regard to Scott's thesis, to other contemporary dissenting groups.

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bowing and scraping, believing that only God should be so honoured. They would use a particular form of the third person pronoun (thee and thou) to those socially superior to them who would expect to be referred to, more politely, as 'you'.[9] Quakers steadfastly refused to doff their hats in the presence of superiors – perhaps not so unusual in the North but a distinct breach of etiquette in the Southern counties. To fail to remove one's hat in court meant certain imprisonment. They treated each day of the week as one and so continued to trade on Sundays, even on Christmas Day; indeed, they despised the heathenish names given to the days of the week and months of the year and preferred to call Sunday 'first-day', January 'first-month' and so on. Citing scripture (Matthew 5.33-37 and James 5:12), Quakers refused to swear oaths, a testimony which exacerbated their position *vis-à-vis* the legal system, especially when brought to court. Brought to trial for some other misdemeanour was bad enough, but refusing to swear the oath would mean certain imprisonment and possible transportation to the Colonies as well as punishment for the original offence.[10]

Quakers attacked the Established Church as a powerful institution, mockingly calling churches 'steeple-houses'. They refused to attend divine worship, then a statutory duty and were for this reason continually prosecuted for recusancy.[11] Furthermore, they were far from passive in their relationship with the members of the clergy (that is, with Anglican ministers). Davies (2000: 23) notes that Quakers were well-known for pinning 'scurrilous libels' on church doors and heckling clergy in the street.[12] They published pamphlets attacking the very grounds of a paid clergy and went as far as interrupting divine services in an attempt to subject ministers to 'the Truth' in a distinctly public manner. As early as 1649 Fox was beaten for daring to interrupt a sermon in Mansfield-Woodhouse. His own account (Fox 1952: 44) is typically colourful:

> Now while I was at Mansfield-Woodhouse, I was moved to go to the steeple-house there on First-day, out of the meeting in Mansfield, and when the priest had done I declared the truth to the priest and people. But the people fell upon me with their fists, books, and without compassion or mercy beat me down in the steeplehouse and almost smothered me in it, being under them. And sorely was I bruised in the steeplehouse, and they threw me against the walls and when that they had thrust and thrown me out of the steeplehouse , when I came into the yard I fell down, being so sorely bruised and beat among them. And I got up again and then they punched and thrust and struck me up and down and they set me in the stocks and brought a whip to whip me, but did not. And as I sat in the stocks they threw stones at me, and my head, arms, breast, shoulders, back, and sides were so bruised that I was mazed and dazzled with the blows.

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[9] For a thorough investigation of Quaker speech see Bauman 1983.

[10] There were at this time a number of oaths that Quakers chose not to swear. Refusing the Oath of Supremacy, acknowledging the Monarchs supreme over the Anglican Church was punishable by *praemuire,* which place an individual outside the King's protection, involved forfeiture of all goods and chattels and loss of income from property, and imprisonment. Refusal to swear the Oath of Allegiance, which judges might require anyone brought before them to swear, resulted in similar severe punishment (Horle 1988: 49-51).

[11] Throughout the period Quakers were involved in a vitriolic 'pamphlet war' with those who attacked their stand on the Established Church. Richard Baxter (1657) published a booklet providing 24 reasons why 'no Christian, or reasonable man, should be a Quaker. His first reason is the fact that while they hurl abuse at 'the Church and minister of Christ'. they are 'of no church themselves, they are no Christians...'

[12] Hurling insults such as 'Serpent', 'liar', 'deceiver', children of the Devil', 'hypocrite', dumb dog', 'scarlet coloured beast', 'Babylon's merchants', and 'sodomites' almost suggests that the clergy were the resisters and Quakers the oppressors!

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The testimonies were generally defended either in terms of scriptural prescription or proscription. In some instances, the testimony against a professional clergy for instance, Quakers argued that the gospels simply did not mandate such practice.[13] Although not a testimony, a common source of public disgust was the Quaker practice of encouraging women to preach, and to become involved in the day-to-day organisation of church activities. And certainly, records of 'sufferings' include many case involving women.[14] Although several leading members of the movement had served in some capacity in the Parliamentary army during the Civil Wars, by the mid 1655, Fox and other 'public' Friends had established the Quaker peace testimony as a matter of fact.[15] This was a serious form of resistance, not primarily because Quakers would no longer serve in the armed forces, but because they refused to subsidise acts of war in any sense – this was a costly action for the government both during the Interregnum.[16] Quakers were, on the whole, despised, not only by those in authority (Reay 1985: Ch. 4). They were accused of haughtiness and hypocrisy, they were labelled as Catholics and witches, and thought to be members of other more extreme radical groups (they were often confused with Ranters, for instance).[17] Public Friends (and perhaps none more so than Fox) could be abrasive, even aggressive in debate – Richard Baxter, a leading Puritan critic of Quakers and Quakerism, wrote, 'I have had more railing language from them in one letter, than I ever heard from all the scolds in the country to my remembrance this twenty years' (Quoted in Moore 2000: 110). Their penchant for enthusiastic displays of metaphorical and embodied critique, especially in the 1650s, must have proved both frightening and extremely provocative to all who witnessed them. To quote from Reay (1985: 36):

> Several Quakers went 'naked as a sign' ... Such 'signs' were highly symbolic and clearly intended to shock. Sarah Goldsmith walked through Bristol markets in 1655 with her 'haire about her eares', bare legged, and clad only in a 'long hairy coat'. Richard Sale, a Quaker tailor from Hoole (near Chester), stood clothes in sackcloth with flowers in one hand and weeds in the other, and ashes sprinkled in his hair. Solomon Eccles, a former music teacher from London who had burned his instruments and some books when he turned Quaker, walked through Smithfield naked, with a pan of burning coals upon his head.

However, the two acts of resistance which most provoked the State and Established Church was the determination of Quakers to establish and attend their own meetings for worship on the one hand, and their refusal to pay tithes on the other. In both cases the result of their resistance came at a considerable cost. I will dwell at some length on these two modes of Quaker resistance, beginning with an account of tithes, before discussing the issue of Quaker worship.

There was, by 1650, a continuing public debate regarding tithes. The Quakers refused payment from the outset. Quakers were not the only one to refuse payment but their consistent and increasingly organised refusal to pay set them apart. By 1655 those who called themselves 'Quaker' would be

[13] There is an extensive secondary literature relating to these testimonies. Broad coverage is provided in Braithwaite 1955, 1961; Barbour 1965.

[14] 'Sufferings' were the punishments meted out to Friends and collected and collated ever more systematically by Quaker meetings and eventually recorded in 'the Great Book of Sufferings' maintained by a central committee in London.

[15] For more on the Peace Testimony see Barbour 1964 Ch 8.

[16] The Interregnum is that period which begins with the regicide of Charles I in 1649 and ends with the Restoration of the monarchy (in the person of Charles II) in 1660.

[17] Reading their pamphlets, it would appear that Quakers stood against not only the Church and State, but against everyone.

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disowned by the group should it become known that they had paid tithes. Friends also refused tithe payment on their behalf by non-Quaker supporters.

A tithe is a customary payment to the local minister (or a substitute) in kind, amounting to one tenth of one's produce. In rural areas such payment was generally made in wheat or corn, sometimes livestock. In urban areas, it would more often be paid in cash. Tithes had been a contentious issue since the fourteenth century but their position was questioned with greater urgency after Henry's reform of the Church in the 1530s.[18] After the Reformation in England the assets of monasteries and priories, along with their tithes, annuities and pensions, became Crown property. These property rights were subsequently sold to lay impropriators who assumed the right to appoint ministers to clerical livings and to collect the tithe. Indeed, as Brace (1998: 16-17) puts it, 'Refusal to pay tithes became an article of faith for Quakers'. Various radical groups, the Quakers chief amongst them, attacked tithe payment on at least three fronts. First, they challenged their scriptural basis and secondly, they argued that whereas tithes were once primarily a source of common good, they had lately become the prize of absentee landlords. Finally, tithes were perceived not only by Quakers but by the majority of dissenting groups as a popish (Catholic) abomination. (Brace 1998: 139-40; Morgan 1993: 171-5).

Quakers began suffering for non-payment of tithes in the early 1650s and spokesmen for the moment immediately put pen to paper. According to Horle's reckoning (1988: 281) in the country of Cumberland alone during this period, convictions for tithe non-payment numbered 3,652, out of a total number of Quaker conviction of 4,083.[19] In most cases, the punishment would have been distraint of goods, that is, the confiscation of the convicted Quaker's goods equal to the tithe and a fine; in fact, treble payments were common. In prosecuting Quakers for tithe misdemeanours, local magistrates, clergy and informants, as well as a number of other minor officials such as constables, worked together to maximise the financial (and sometimes physical) damage inflicted on them. Quakers were not the only group to refuse tithe payment. Baptists, for instance, withheld payments in some cases, though their corporate position, at first ambiguous, was by the restoration, entirely law-abiding Quakers, for ever taking the hard line came to see Baptists as feeble backsliders (Brace 1998: 31-4).[20]

[18] There are many Quaker texts dated from this period which aim to call into question the right of anyone to claim tithes, see for example: Benson 1679; Farnworth 1655b; Fisher 1659; Foster 1688; Fox 1654, 1657; Grayes 1657; Hubberthorne 1658, 1659a, b; Osborne 1659; Pearson 1657.

[19] It is worth noting that Cumberland was a rural county even by the standards of the day. Tithes were always notoriously difficult to collect in towns, however, and Horle (1988: 284) indicates that there were just 237 tithe convictions for London and Middlesex during the period amounted to 237 (total Quaker convictions amounted to 4,855). Morgan indicates (1993: 196) that prosecutions for non-payment of tithes, in Lancashire at least) increased during this period. The total number of Quakers in England by 1688 was probably about 55,000.

[20] Indeed Friends were as apt to criticise other dissident groups as they were the Church and State. They found certain other radical groups abhorrent, the Ranters in particular. See for example Farnworth 1655a; also discussions in McGregor 1976-7; McGregor, Capp, Smith and Gibbons 1993; Davis 1990; and Cole 1956.

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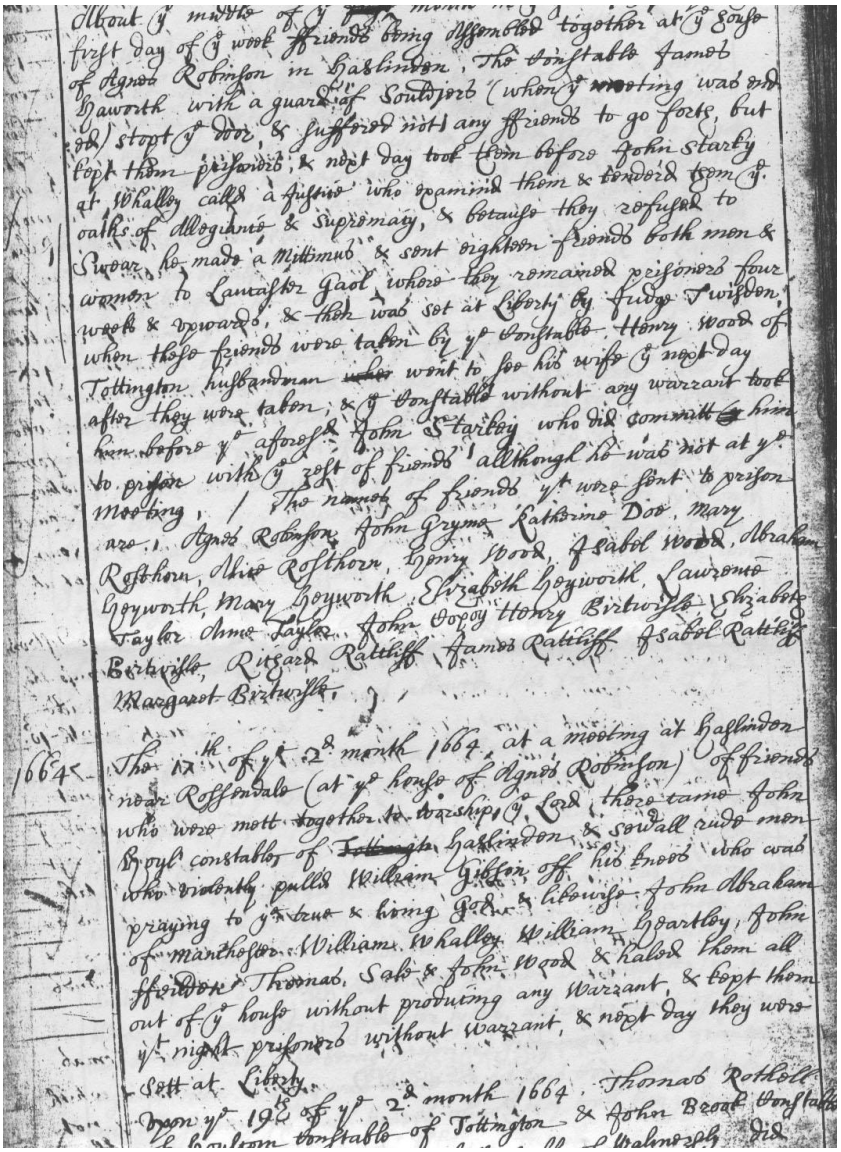

A page from a record of Quaker sufferings (Marsden Monthly Meeting, (Lancashire)

The corporate decision to refuse tithe payment, for whatever reason, was a serious act of resistance. No matter what reasons Friends offered, the elite comprising both secular and ecclesiastical authorities say this action as undermining the very fabric of society. As Laura Brace (1998: 35) notes:

> Tithes were embedded in the religious, political, social and legal fabric: the Church, the state authorities and the radicals were all able to use the debates around them as a sophisticated tool with which to gauge the attitudes and normative commitments of bother members and their opponents...For the Established Church, refusal to pay implied dangerous sectarianism, while the state regarded tithe opposition as a threat to the principle of taxation, and by extension to private property itself.

Along with tithe refusal, the determination of Quakers to meet for worship after their own fashion represented an act of resistance which occasioned brutal retaliation on the part of the authorities.

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Such 'conventicles' were illegal, under a variety of Acts and older statutes, including the Conventicle Acts of 1664 and 1670, the Quaker Act (1662) and the Five Miles Act. They were also charged with associated offences, including recusancy, vagrancy and, more seriously, outlawry (Horle 1988: 142-46). Charges were also brought by informers, who were encouraged in their activities by the second Conventicle Act. To make matters worse, Quakers were often unaware of these charges and were then subpoenaed for non-appearance in court.

During this period there were two forms of Quaker meeting and we can distinguish between the larger and more anarchic 'threshing meetings' which were ad hoc, evangelising meetings held either indoors or out of doors and sometimes drew thousands, to the far more intimate 'retired' or silent meetings attended primarily by those who were already 'convinced'. Quakers also rejected the need for purpose-built premises for their meetings, denying that one place might be more sacred than another, believing that the True Tabernacle was less a building and more a condition of one's faith and practice. The fact that Friends were happy to meet anywhere was a nightmare for the authorities. (Horle 1988: 6-7; Braithwaite 1955: 184, 377; Moore 2000: 146-50). For different reasons, then, both types of meeting posed complex problems for the agencies whose role it was to prevent them. At various times, though particularly between 1660-65, Quaker meetings were perpetually broken up with varying degrees of violence. Quakers never met in secret, but the legalised use of informants meant that some retired (or 'settled') meetings were prevented by the prior ransacking of premises. On occasion, such meetings would simply adjourn to the street or some other public place at which point those Friends present would come under physical attack and or dragged off to prison to await trial for any one of a number of misdemeanours. Records of Quaker sufferings included hundreds of accounts of disrupted meetings and Quakers were far more likely to be imprisoned for 'holding a conventicle' than for any other reason.[21] Space permits the inclusion here of just one example. Certain officials became notorious for their persecution of Friends, men such as Sir William Armourer who harried Friends meeting in Reading soon after the First Conventicle Act. In March 1664 he marched thirty four Friends from meeting to prison (citing the Quaker Act) and then others, mostly women, during the following fortnight. Children continued to meet in their parents' absence – these were subsequently taken out and beaten. The women were released in June but taken again during the months that followed. The sorry tale continues (I quote from Braithwaite (1961: 227):

> The men were never brought up on the Quaker Act, but after forty weeks were tried on the oath of Allegiance and acquitted; but many more were soon taken again, and for some years the principal Friends were in prison, and the meeting at Thomas Curtis' house was kept by young people and a few stray adults, mostly women. Armourer came one morning in January 1666, and found only four young maids. A servant brought him water, which he threw again and again in their faces, and turned them out. After the Second Conventicle Act, which came into force in May 1670, he illegally padlocked two doors, for it was Curtis' private house; but Friends met in another room, which he also nailed up.

And so it went on for almost a decade. An important outcome of the continual flouting of the law regarding illegal conventicles was the constant and entirely public testing of the will and rationale of the authorities, particularly of the Cromwell during the Interregnum, of the Monarchy following the Restoration and of Parliament throughout the period. The actions I have described were certainly counter-hegemonic in so far as they formed a co-ordinated attack on the status quo, but they were also, *pace* Scott, entirely public. Quaker acts of resistance, and virtually their entire faith and practice

[21] For instance of the 212 Quakers incarcerated in Lancashire between 1660-64, 196 cases were for attending Quaker meetings – just eight for non-payment of tithes.

Durham Anthropology Journal
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ISSN 1742-2930

during these early years, did not form and were not a part of a hidden transcript, but constituted a continual reminder to the powerful and powerless alike, that here was an alternative to the status quo that could not and would not be dismissed, either by law or by unlawful force of arms. The outcome for Quakers of these acts of resistance were terrible in terms of physical and financial punishment. They faced trial under a wide range of punitive legislation, chief among them the Conventicle Acts (1664 and 1670) and the so-called Quaker Act (1662) of the Restoration Period which led to a wave of anti-Quaker activity.

Conclusions

The central question posed in this paper is 'in what ways does the resistance practiced by Quakers in the mid seventeenth century illuminate Scott's thesis?' First, although, the Quaker does not comprise a class, it does represent a class and so is a fair test of Scott's argument. However, it is difficult to distinguish between religious and other forms of resistance (political, economic, cultural) in this instance. Whatever the intentions of individual Friends, corporately, the Quaker movement was primarily a radical, religious movement. The stated aims of seventeenth century Friends was to usher in the Second Covenant: they were fighting 'the Lamb's War'. Given their belief in the free gift to all men and women of the inward light (of Christ) the social implication of their faith and practice was undoubtedly *levelling*, calling into question the legitimacy of the hierarchical society which represented the status quo. Their actions whether actually or merely construed as illegal posed a major threat to those in power (whether represented by Cromwell or the King).

Their resistance was made all the more public through their use of the printing press. Quaker pamphleteers issued forth a stream of writing both defending their own position and attacking that of their opponents (more or less everyone else), and generally both simultaneously. Their energetic use of the printed word may be said to have reached a peak with Fox's *The Mystery of the Great Whore Unfolded...*(1659), in which the de facto leader of the movement responded, painstakingly and belligerently, to 100 of the most widely circulated anti-Quaker tracts in a document numbering over 600 pages.[22] At the same time, Fox was developing the organisation of the group which involved a series of levels of 'meeting' from local congregations to central (one might say 'executive') meeting involving representative from all over the country). By 1680 Quaker meetings were receiving a plethora of prescriptions and proscriptions ('advices') on right behaviour; meetings, in their turn, were sending accounts of the sufferings of local Friends to a central committee in London ('Meeting for Sufferings') in

> an attempt to provide documentary evidence for presentation to Parliament and/or the King. Alongside to these organisation strategies, Friends also wrote voluminously to each other – and collections of epistles were distributed more widely.

As Horle (1988: 3) avers, 'Secular radicalism joined with spiritual Quakerism to produce an explosive reaction against perceived evils in English society.' Quaker resistance to what they considered ungodly laws met an extremely repressive and violent response from both secular and ecclesiastical authorities. The careful records kept by well-organised Quaker meetings provide a clear unbroken account of their sufferings under the law during the period under review. Distraints and imprisonments number in the thousands; Friends suffered verbal insults and regular beatings both at the hands of the authorities and the public at large. Their places of meetings were regularly ransacked and at least 114 met their death in prison in London and Middlesex alone (Horle 1988:

[22] On the question of whether Fox can be said to have been the founder and leader of the Quaker movement see Braithwaite 1955, 1961 and Ingle 1994.

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Volume 16(2) 2009: 8–22. Copyright © 2009 Peter Collins
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284). But did their resistance lead to an outcome that might be termed revolutionary? This is undoubtedly a complex question but the simple answer is no. The Act of Toleration, became law in 1689 but tolerance of religious dissent unfolded slowly from the 1670s and by 1700 Quakers (and other less radical dissidents) were allowed to worship, unmolested in a manner of their choosing. They were still penalised for non-payment of tithes, and had in any case and for over a decade engaged less and less in acts of resistance. The expansion of religious toleration was more a matter of evolution than revolution – there was no final, cataclysmic act of defiance which led to the world being turned upside down.

However, what is most obvious about the Quaker case, most obviously tests Scott's theory. Quaker resistance to a series of murderously repressive regimes was almost entirely public. Their transcript was open for all to witness; their message was free of all disguise (*DAR,* Ch. 6). Indeed, they virtually celebrated their radical non-conformity in the face of the authorities, by refusing to recognise clergy except to attack them in their own churches, by continuing to hold their (silent) meetings in public, by continuing to refuse tithe payment, by encouraging women to preach and so on.[23] At no point in the early period of the movement did Quakers retreat to a place that could conceivably be described as off-stage.[24] In fact, leading Friends, including Fox, Naylor, Hubberthorne, Dewsbury, Burrough, Fell, Audland and many others, manoeuvred the authorities into positions where debate was public and centre-stage (Moore 2000).[25] George Fox, in particular, attempted to juxtapose the ungodly church and state with the godly faith and practice of Quakerism at every turn. However, a number of commentators suggest that Quaker resistance was less exuberant after the Restoration. Indeed, one leading light, Richard Hubberthorne, wrote in 1660 (quoted in Morgan 1993: 32) would continue to be

> obedient subjects under every Power ordained by God, and to every ordinance of man (set up by him) for the Lord's sake, whether unto King as supreme, or unto Governours or any set up n authority by him, who are for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well, …

Morgan is right in saying that, from 1660, Quaker texts increasingly emphasise their tendency to passive resistance. It is possible that after a decade of continual oppression Friends had grown weary of the battle. By the turn of the century the movement had already entered what has been called its 'quietist' phase. The point in resisting was reduced during the 1670s and greatly reduced by the Toleration Act of 1689, which granted freedom of worship to nonconformist groups – but not to Catholics, whose position vacillated even more wildly than the Quakers during the period. For this reason – and others – subjecting seventeenth century English Catholicism to this kind of interrogation would prove at least as interesting and as valuable a test of Scott's thesis. But perhaps the main point to be made is that general theories such as Scott's, will contain their scholarly worth just so long as they provide an incentive for such particular studies.

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[23] The role of women was crucial to the establishment of Quakerism. Fox and Elisabeth Hooton travelled together 'in the ministry' even before 1650. Margaret Fell facilitated organisation development of the movement by allowing Quakers to use her house (Swarthmore Hall) as a base (Trevett 1991; Mack 2002; Kunze 1993).

[24] Indeed, Quakers seemed almost to revel in their suffering. For example, Isaac Penington, a 'public Friend' who, hoping to reassure Friends that he was well, wrote to them from Aylesbury gaol: '[The Lord] made my bonds pleasant to me, and my noisome prison (enough to have destroyed my weakly and tenderly educated nature) a place of pleasure and delight, where I was comforted by my God day night and day.' (Quoted in Braithwaite 1961: 11)

[25] Scott's discussion of charisma is both interesting and certainly apt in relation to Quaker leaders and to Fox in particular (*DAR*: 121-3). Certainly, Fox was considered a charismatic man, and as Scott argues, this quality was undoubtedly socially constructed. However, once again, this construction was entirely open and can not be seen as rooted in a 'hidden transcript'.

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ISSN 1742-2930

Setting aside the matter of the 'hidden transcript' for a moment, resistance, for the most part, argues Scott, amounts to the accumulation of many apparently trivial acts. Together they may come to pose a serious threat to those in power. The threat posed by Quakers was apparent to the regimes of Cromwell and the Restoration monarchs from the outset, not entirely because of the evident religious dissent but because of the potential for social disruption (even revolution) that these beliefs and practices suggested. The elite held that Quakers might presently be arguing about 'thee' and 'thy' but would soon open the debate about 'thine' and 'mine', thus indicating the economic and political consequences of what might appear at first sight to be entirely a matter of conscience. Although it was unlikely that Quakers intended to bring about an earthly revolution, it was this outcome that their opponents most dreaded, and the reason they came to face a degree of repression that was both concerted and often violent. More surprising is the fact that the Quaker movement not only survived but thrived during these years of sustained and brutal oppression – but that is another story.

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